

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-110-2004-194 -EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT NAME: Rube-Clarkson Fence Extension

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T. 2 S. R. 103 W. Sec. 15 NE

APPLICANT: Twin Buttes Ranch Co.

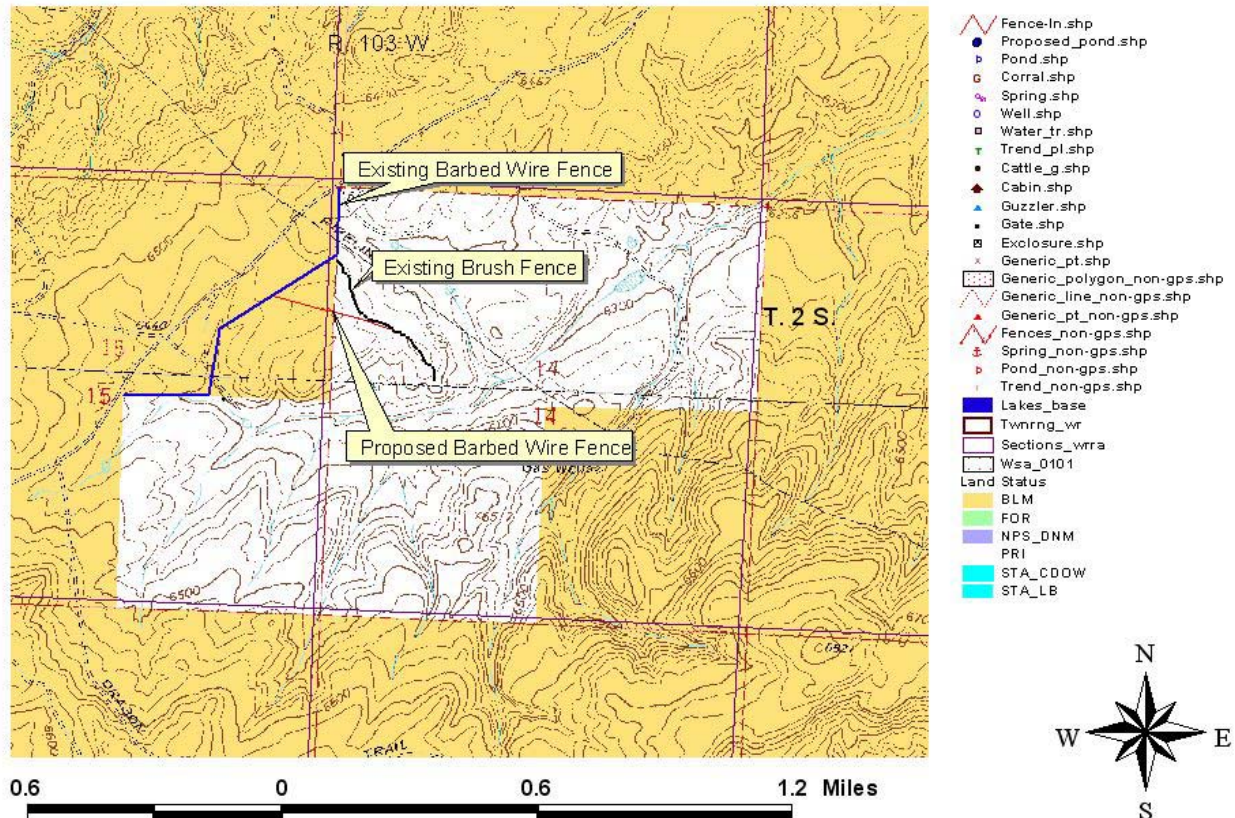
ISSUES AND CONCERNS (optional): None

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Background/Introduction: Twin Buttes Ranch has requested permission to construct 713 feet of 4-strand barbed wire fence across a parcel of public land within the Rube-Clarkson pasture. The proposed fence would replace a decrepit brush fence. The purpose of this fence is to further subdivide the pastures within the Rube-Clarkson Pasture. The proposed fence would tie into an existing fence on the west side of the pasture, and a brush fence on the east side (private). This existing fence is located on BLM and is noted on our maps, but does not have a project number. The proposed fence would be located on an existing (cleared) pipeline route, following the north edge of the cleared right-of-way.

Proposed Action: As stated above the proposed fence would be a four-strand barbed wire fence with wooden corners and steel line posts. Spacing for the wire would be 16, 6, 8, and 12 from the bottom to the top. No clearing of the fence line is required. Surface disturbance would consist of planting the wooden posts and would not exceed 20 square feet. Because of the small area involved no seeding would be required.

Rube-Clarkson Fence



No Action Alternative: Under this alternative the fence would not be constructed.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD: None

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: Page 2-23

Decision Language: 5) identification of range improvements to enhance rangeland productivity and management.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The only cultural resource in the immediate area is the Rangely Dragon Road. No intact portions of the original trail were identified within the inventory corridor.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: None

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: No invasive species were inventoried during layout of the fence line. Cheatgrass is in the area but because of the seeded species in the pipeline right-of-way, is a minority component.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Surface disturbance would be minimal consisting of digging and placing no more than ten wooden posts and driving steel posts for a maximum disturbance of less than 10 square feet. There is little opportunity for noxious weed introduction or establishment. No seeding is required and as such no opportunity for the introduction of non-native species.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts.

Mitigation: None

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The proposed fence would be constructed along the interface of an existing pipeline corridor and mature pinyon-juniper stand. The pipeline corridor is herbaceous in character and likely supports very low densities of such species as western meadowland and vesper sparrow. There are a number of migratory birds that fulfill nesting functions in adjacent woodlands during the months of May, June, and July, including several species identified as having higher conservation interest by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, Partners in Flight program (i.e., gray flycatcher, juniper titmouse, black-throated gray warbler).

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Fence construction along a previously cleared right-of-way corridor would represent a brief, low intensity form of disturbance that would not be expected to disrupt nesting activities of migratory birds in adjacent woodland habitats regardless of when the fence were constructed. In the event construction were to occur during the nesting season, less than 2 acres of grassland habitat along the working corridor would be subject to disturbance capable of failing a nest attempt. The probability of fence construction involving a nest attempt would be low and in the worst case would likely be limited to no more than one nest of a species with lower conservation interest. This project is intended to enable improved livestock distribution and provide the means to more effectively rest each pasture as needed to improve herbaceous composition and productivity. Improved understory development would translate to incremental increases in the abundance and diversity of foodstuffs (e.g., seed, substrate for invertebrate prey) and enhanced effectiveness of nesting cover for migratory birds throughout these pastures.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no land use authorized that would have potential to disrupt the nesting activity of breeding birds. This alternative would fail to take advantage of a feature that is expected to enhance livestock distribution and incrementally enhance food and cover derived from herbaceous ground cover.

Mitigation: None.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no animals listed, proposed, or candidate to the Endangered Species Act, or animals considered sensitive by BLM, that are known to inhabit or derive important benefit from the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: This project has no potential to directly or indirectly affect populations or habitats of special status species.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Failure to construct this project would have no influence on special status animals.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: Because the two alternatives would have no conceivable potential to influence populations or habitats of special status species, they have no bearing on the status or condition of the land health standards in off-site situations.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored or disposed of at sites included in the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No hazardous or other solid wastes would be generated under the no-action alternative.

Mitigation: The permittee shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the proposed action.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:

No ACEC's, flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, Wilderness, or Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wetlands and Riparian zones, threatened, endangered or sensitive plants exist within the area affected by the proposed action. Impacts to Air and Water Quality are not anticipated. For threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species and, Public Land Health Standard would not be applicable since neither the proposed nor the no-action alternative would have any influence on populations of, or habitats potentially occupied by, special status plants. Furthermore, there is no reasonable likelihood that the proposed action or no action alternative would have an influence on whether water quality would meet the Public Land Health Standard. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: The fence line is in soil mapping unit #74; Rentsac-Moyerson-Rock outcrop complex on 5 to 65 percent slopes. This map unit is on foothills and ridges. The

ecological site for Rentsac soil is Pinyon-Juniper woodland, and Moyerson soil is in Clayey Slopes.

The Rentsac soil is shallow and well drained. It formed in residuum derived dominantly from sandstone. Typically, the surface layer is grayish brown channery loam about 5 inches thick. The next layer is brown very channery loam about 4 inches thick. The underlying material is very pale brown extremely flaggy loam 7 inches thick. Sandstone is at a depth of 16 inches. Depth to sandstone ranges from 10 to 20 inches. In some areas the surface layer is quite variable in texture. Permeability of the Rentsac soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is very low. Effective rooting depth is 10 to 20 inches. Runoff is medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to very high.

The Moyerson soil is shallow and well drained. It formed in residuum derived dominantly from shale. Typically, the surface layer is light gray stony clay loam about 2 inches thick. The next layer is gray clay loam about 8 inches thick. The underlying material is gray clay 7 inches thick. Shale is at a depth of 17 inches. Depth to shale ranges from 10 to 20 inches. In some areas the surface layer is silty clay loam, silty clay, light clay, or bouldery clay loam. Permeability of the Moyerson soil is slow. Available water capacity is low. Effective rooting depth is 10 to 20 inches. Runoff is medium to rapid, and the hazard of water erosion is very high.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Surface disturbance associated with construction of the fence would not increase soil erosion. There is expected to be a decrease in vegetation cover on both sides of the fence where livestock trails are expected to develop. Depending on the intensity of use of each pasture there is expected to be loss of soil from these trails possibly creating gullies. Complying with mitigation for the maintenance of drainage off the stock trails, the opportunity for developing gullies would be small.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no changes from the current situation.

Mitigation: Permit holder is responsible for maintaining the existing drainage patterns along this fence-line. Heavy equipment would not be approved for this maintenance.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: The indicators for upland soils would be used to determine changes in upland soil health. With the proposed mitigation the public land health standards for soils would be maintained.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Vegetation of the proposed project is a seeded pipeline right-of-way through a pinyon-juniper woodland site. Seeded species include crested, western and pubescent wheatgrass. Cover is approximately 20% and the soils have been stabilized.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Proposed project would disturb less than 10 square feet of vegetation. Any disturbance would be invaded by the adjacent seeded species within three years. Cattle are expected to walk this fence line creating trails on both sides of the fence which would be devoid of vegetation. The ability to exclude livestock from one pasture or the other provides the opportunity to rest each pasture as needed to improve composition and productivity.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts.

Mitigation If the standards for Vegetation Public land Health are not being met corrective action would be taken. This could include closing of the pastures, construction of additional fencing or removal of fences. Corrective action would occur following an analysis of the causative factors for not achieving the vegetation standard.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): The vegetation on-site meet the standard for vegetation health.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Aquatic habitat nearest the proposed project is mainstem Douglas Creek which, although at times intermittent, supports a beaver-based aquatic system that supports leopard frogs and speckled dace. The proposed project is separated from this aquatic system by over 12 miles of ephemeral channel.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Although improved livestock management attending this project proposal is expected to enhance local herbaceous composition and production, the incremental effects of this action on the condition and function of Douglas Creek's aquatic habitats would likely be imperceptible because of the distance removed and the relatively small effective difference in soil stability potentially gained.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Vegetation benefits associated with the proposed action would not be realized under the no-action alternative, but it is unlikely that failure to construct the fence would have any effective influence on downstream aquatic systems in Douglas Creek (see *Consequences of the Proposed Action*).

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Douglas Creek's aquatic habitats currently meet the Land Health standards. Although the two alternatives would have no reasonable potential to influence these aquatic habitats and would, therefore, have no effective bearing on the status or condition of the land health standards applied to Douglas Creek, the proposed action offers incremental improvements in watershed conditions and better complements the aquatic health standard.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The project area is encompassed by the general deer and elk winter ranges that are most consistently occupied from October through May. Non-game wildlife using this area are typical and widely distributed in extensive like (pinyon-juniper and Wyoming big sagebrush) habitats across the Resource Area and northwest Colorado; there are no narrowly endemic or highly specialized species known to inhabit those lands potentially influenced by this action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Fence construction along a previously cleared right-of-way corridor would represent a brief, low intensity form of disturbance that, depending on timing, would have only the most negligible and temporary influence on big game winter distribution or nongame breeding activities (see Migratory Bird section).

This project is intended to improve livestock distribution and provide the means to more effectively rest each pasture as needed to improve herbaceous composition and productivity. Improved understory development throughout these pastures would translate to incremental increases in the abundance and diversity of foodstuffs (e.g., seed, leafy forage, substrate for invertebrate prey) available to all resident wildlife, as well as enhanced effectiveness of ground cover for local ground-nesting birds and small mammals.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no land use authorized that would have potential to affect local big game winter use or the breeding activities of nongame birds and mammals. This alternative would fail to take advantage of a feature that is expected to enhance livestock distribution and incrementally enhance food and cover derived from herbaceous ground cover.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): These pastures currently meet the land health standard for animal communities. The proposed action would promote incremental improvements in the composition and productivity of herbaceous ground cover—trends that are consistent with continued and enhanced achievement of land health standards. The No-action alternative would continue to meet the land health standards, but would offer no opportunity for further advance in habitat function or conditions.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
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Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation		X	
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management	X		
Forest Management	X		
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	
Paleontology	X		
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations			X
Recreation		X	
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses		X	

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The proposed project is within the Twin Buttes Grazing allotment and the Texas Creek Pasture, which are grazed by cattle during the period December through May. The Rube-Clarkson pasture is fenced as a private pasture but contains approximately 40 acres of Public Land. The northern portion of the Rube Clarkson pasture is used to feed cattle during the late part of the winter and early spring. The BLM lands are not used as a part of the feeding operation. Livestock's use of the BLM lands is minimal probably because of the feeding operation.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed fence would bisect the Rube-Clarkson pasture allowing the applicant to control livestock use within each of the pastures. There is no opportunity to maintenance feed on the newly created pastures because of trees and rough terrain. Maintenance feeding is also not allowed by grazing regulation. If grazing use on BLM lands within the pasture is determined as a problem, there is the ability (by regulation) to require a fence change, removing the BLM from the pasture.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts.

Mitigation: None

REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS

Affected Environment: The proposed fence line is partly located on a pipeline right-of-way corridor.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed fence line will be constructed on a cleared space that contains at least two pipeline rights-of-way: COC30303I and COC63205 (EnCana Oil & Gas). There are several other rights-of-way in the immediate area: COC14322 (Questar Pipeline Company), COC3433 (Moon Lake Electric), and COC56949 (EnCana Oil & Gas).

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: The National One Call system will have to be activated for exact location of the existing pipelines that will be involved in the fence construction. The Colorado One Call numbers are (800) 922-1987 or (800) 833-9417.

VISUAL RESOURCE

Affected Environment: The proposed action is within a VRM class IV area. The objective of this class is to provide for management activities which require major modifications of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. These management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is small in scale relative to the surrounding landscape; therefore, any modifications will be unseen to the casual observer, and VRM IV objectives will be met.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No impact on visual resources.

Mitigation: Remove as little vegetation as possible during construction.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: Cumulative impacts from range project as well as other development activities were analyzed in the White River Resource Area Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/FEIS) completed in June 1996. Current activities, including the proposed action, has not exceeded the cumulative impacts from the foreseeable development analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS.

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED: None

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Caroline Hollowed	Planning and Environmental Coordinator	Air Quality
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Gabrielle Elliott	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Robert Fowler	Forester	Invasive, Non-Native Species
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Bo Brown	Hazmat Collateral	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Caroline Hollowed	Planning and Environmental Coordinator	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Robert Fowler	Forester	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Robert Fowler	Forester	Soils
Robert Fowler	Forester	Vegetation
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access and Transportation
Ken Holsinger	Natural Resource Specialist	Fire Management
Robert Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Robert Fowler	Forester	Rangeland Management
Penny Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources
Valerie Dobrich	Natural Resource Specialist	Wild Horses

Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE: The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION/RATIONALE: It is my decision to authorize the Rube-Clarkson extension fence through a cooperative range improvement agreement in accordance with 43 CFR 4120.3. This agreement will include the standards and mitigation measures described in this Environmental Assessment.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

1. The National One Call system will have to be activated for exact location of the existing pipelines that will be involved in the fence construction. The Colorado One Call numbers are (800) 922-1987 or (800) 833-9417.
2. If the standards for Vegetation Public land Health are not being met corrective action would be taken. This could include closing of the pastures, construction of additional fencing or removal of fences. Corrective action would occur following an analysis of the causative factors for not achieving the vegetation standard.
3. Permit holder is responsible for maintaining the existing drainage patterns along this fence-line. Heavy equipment would not be approved for this maintenance.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: Authorization for the fence would be through a Rangeland Cooperative Agreement that would include the above mitigation measures. Additionally the fence specifications would be included. Compliance would be associated with following the Cooperative Agreement and would be the responsibility of the Rangeland Management Specialist responsible for this area.

NAME OF PREPARER: Robert J. Fowler *RF*

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: *CPHollowed 1/24/05*

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: *Thom F. Walter*
Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: *01/25/05*

ATTACHMENTS: Location map of the proposed action.

Location of Proposed Action CO-110-2004-194-EA

